

Don't Miss Your Moment

Luke 19:28-48

In Leo Tolstoy's famous Christmas story, "Where Love Is," the main character is Martin, an old cobbler in a rural Russian village who is bitter with the world from the loss of his wife and child. As he tells a priest, "me and God don't get along anymore."

The priest asks Martin to make a new cover for a very important holy book, and while Martin doesn't feel worthy of the job, due to his lack of faith, the priest gently prods him to read some of the book and give the job a try.

One night as Martin sat reading from the Gospels he thought he heard someone calling him. He listened and heard clearly: "Martin, Martin, look out into the street tomorrow for I will come to visit you." He looked around the tiny room, and since he couldn't see anyone he reckoned it must be the Lord Himself who had spoken to him.

So with a great sense of excitement he sat down to his work the next day. As he worked he kept a close eye on the window. He was looking for something or someone special. But nothing exciting happened; just the usual people passed by about their everyday business.

The day wore on and nobody special passed by. In the early afternoon he saw a pair of boots outside the window that were very familiar to him. They belonged to an old soldier called Stephen. Going to the window he looked up and saw the old man hitting his hands together to warm them for it was bitterly cold outside. Martin wished he'd move on, for he was afraid he might obstruct his view and he wouldn't see the Lord when he passed. But old Stephen just stood there by the railing.

Finally it occurred to Martin that maybe Stephen had nothing to eat all day. So he tapped on the window and beckoned him to come in. He sat him by the fire and gave him tea and bread. Stephen was most grateful He said he hadn't eaten for two whole days. As he left Martin gave him his second overcoat as a shield against the biting cold.

But all the time Martin was entertaining Stephen he hadn't forgotten the window. Every time a shadow fell on it he looked up but nobody extraordinary passed.

Finally, night fell. Martin finished his work and reluctantly closed the shutters. He had so much wanted to see and entertain the Lord. After supper he took down the Gospels and as usual he opened and read at random. After reading for some time Martin put down the book and

reflected. In a flash of inspiration the words of the Lord came to him: *“I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was naked and you clothed me.”* The words thrilled Martin. The Lord HAD visited him (in the person of old Stephen) and he hadn’t missed the opportunity to serve Him!

Have you ever missed an important moment in your life because you were expecting something different than what actually happened? The people of Jesus’ day were no different; because they didn’t believe His words they missed out on being part of His kingdom. Missing their moment had tragic, eternal consequences.

Our text today is a rather lengthy one; but one that’s very important for us to consider. It reveals several responses you and I must have to Jesus or we, too, will miss our moment to enter the kingdom of heaven. So listen to the words of Holy Scripture from **Luke 19:28 to 48**.

This text reveals the RESPONSES necessary for you if you don’t want to miss your moment to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

The First RESPONSE is,

Proclaim the King’s Worth

Jesus is continuing His final ascent to Jerusalem. In a few days He will go to the cross to provide redemption for mankind. But there are some prophecies that need to be fulfilled before that takes place. One of them is found in Zechariah 9:9. *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

So what does Jesus do? He sends two of the disciples into a nearby village with very unusual instructions. “When you get into the village you’ll find a donkey colt tied; a donkey colt that’s never been ridden. Once you find him, untie him, and bring him to me. And if anyone questions what you’re doing, just say ‘The Lord has need of him.’”

This little detail about the donkey colt having never been ridden is part of a larger pattern in Jesus’ life. He occupied a virgin’s womb at His birth, an unbroken colt at His highest point of earthly acclimation, and was buried in a tomb never used before.

So off the disciples go and the scene unfolds just like Jesus predicted. When the owners asked why they were untying the colt the two disciples simply said “The Lord needs him.” We’re

told that when a royal or sacred person rode on such an animal, its owners did not normally put it to customary use from then on. But evidently, that's all it took for them to be satisfied. It's likely they'd heard Jesus was coming. Remember, pilgrims were streaming into Jerusalem from all directions for the Passover. The crowds preceding Him surely would've spread the news.

Suppose for a moment they'd said "Hey, you can't have the colt; it's ours." That would have been perfectly within their rights under the law. But they would've missed their moment. By accepting Jesus' request they were showing His worth, honoring Him as someone special.

Recall that these events are unfolding in the context of what the kingdom of God looks like. Jesus had welcomed the marginalized blind man of Jericho and the ostracized tax-collector to faith in Him; and the people complained. He had just finished warning His listeners about citizens who rejected their king's rule over them. He emphasized the need for faithfulness among His servants as the criteria for dispensing rewards. He was giving the owners of the colt an opportunity to honor Him and serve His kingdom.

These men who owned the colt were made aware of Jesus' request, His need. And they allowed the beast to be taken for His use. If they hadn't given permission, I am certain that Jesus would've found another donkey to meet His needs. But the point I see here is – am I willing to proclaim Jesus' worth by allowing Him to use my resources?

After all, who did the donkey really belong to? Psalm 50:10 and 11: *"For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field are Mine."* That includes an unbroken donkey colt.

So now the disciples have the colt. When they get back to Jesus they take off some of their outer garments and put them on the back of the donkey. Then they seat Jesus on the colt and resume their ascent toward Jerusalem. "[Jesus] allowed this, as befitting the *state* He was **for the first and only time** assuming." He was allowing Himself to be treated as a king.

As the donkey moved up the road more people took off their outer garments and spread them on the ground so the donkey, carrying Jesus, could walk over them. They didn't just throw them down on the ground and leave them there. Instead, picture them laying the garments down, the donkey walks over them; then they retrieve the garments and repeat the process.

Now, notice verse 37. Here the crowds, and Jesus, get their first glimpse of Jerusalem. Scholars tell us this vantage point yields a view of the southeastern corner, the angle of the western walls, and Herod's castle. It was at this juncture that the worshippers burst into loud

Messianic praise and acclamation for all the mighty works they'd seen: Lazarus, Bartimaeus, Zacchaeus, and more. Their hearts are ablaze with the immediate fulfillment of the kingdom.

The adoring crowds of pilgrims cry out "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*" These words echo the angelic choir in Luke 2:14; "*Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*" One difference is, the people's cry is "peace in HEAVEN, and glory in the highest."

Messianic fervor is animating the people. Recall the incident, about a year before this, in John chapter 6, after the feeding of the 5,000, where the people attempted to take Jesus by force and make Him King. So Jesus left the crowds and went into a solitary place, into a mountain to be alone. It was not the right time for a coronation. But now IS the time.

If you compare the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and John all include additional details to this scene we call the Triumphal Entry. Matthew and Mark include the word, "Hosanna," that is, "*Save now.*" These are the words of Ps 118:25, which were understood to refer to Messiah; and so they add, "*to the Son of David, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord (Ps 118:26), Hosanna in the highest.*" This was the very loftiest style in which Jesus could be saluted as the promised Deliverer. But this proclamation would've meant little to Luke's Greek audience.

John tells us that a great multitude of people who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover went out to meet Jesus. So you have two crowds; the one following Him from Bethany, and the one coming from Jerusalem. The ones coming from Jerusalem cut down branches from the palm trees and laid them on the road. Their cries of adulation and worship blended with those coming with Jesus from Bethany. Caught up in the euphoria of the moment their cries proclaiming the king's worth fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah and others.

But there were spoilers in the ranks! John records the Pharisees bitterly talking among themselves; "*You see how we can do nothing, behold, the whole world is following Him.*" Then some of the Pharisees called on Jesus to rebuke His disciples; to silence them. Obviously they thought He'd agree that the people were going too far with this adoration and acclamation.

Jesus reply was quick and seems tinged with righteous indignation. "*If these who shout my praise would be silenced, immediately the stones would cry out!*" Jesus' response is remarkable because prior to this He'd discouraged all public demonstrations in His favor. But now He seems to yield His whole soul to the wide and deep acclaim with a mysterious satisfaction. He seems to regard it as *a necessary* part of the regal dignity in which as Messiah

He for this last time will enter the city. If this praise were not offered by the vast multitude, it would have been *wrung out of the stones* rather than be withheld.

We know from subsequent events how fickle the people's praise was. But at least for the moment, they joyfully and enthusiastically responded to the ministry of Jesus by proclaiming His worth and acknowledging Him as Messiah. They didn't let their moment slip by.

Now, what about you? Have you acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of God, in a personal way? Are you willing to proclaim His worth as King of Kings? To do that means you understand that His position entitles Him to rule over you! All you have becomes His and He is free to use what is His however He wants; your time, your money, your possessions, and even your donkey colt.

Is your proclamation of His worth visible to those around you? Do they know what Jesus the Messiah has done for you? Acknowledging Jesus for who He is, and praising Him as the same, is a moment you must not miss. To miss your moment will have tragic results.

The Second RESPONSE is,

Perceive the Kingdom's Peace

After this interruption by the Pharisees the procession moves forward again. Now the whole of the city bursts into view; the Temple mount with its towering height, and the city seeming to rise miraculously out of the Kidron and Hinnom valleys. At the sight of it, Jesus burst into tears of sorrow and remorse. *"If only you had known, even you, at least in your day i.e. at this moment the things which belong to your peace; but now they are hidden from your eyes."* Luke is the only gospel writer to include this scene of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem.

Do you suppose this scene could've been a little like rush hour traffic on the big city expressway? One car stops, then all the other cars stop, like a chain reaction. I can just hear the people way back in the crowd that day saying, "What's the holdup? What is going on? Why don't you guys move on?"

But the people closest to Jesus could see - and they realized He had stopped the parade. Then they saw His body begin to shake. Maybe at first they thought He was laughing. That would seem natural - everybody else was laughing, and shouting. But then they saw His face, they saw no evidence of laughter. Rather, they saw sorrow and tears.

He wasn't laughing. He was crying. Why was Jesus crying? He looked at the city of Jerusalem. He saw the mixture of faces and the masses of humanity crowding there - and He realized the emptiness of their lives. They hadn't perceived the message of peace. They didn't understand the purpose of His coming. His grief over their blindness was heartbreaking.

In the custom of His people Jesus' weeping was most likely expressed in loud and deep lamentation. Here we see the beautiful, tender humanity of Jesus. Just moments ago He was basking in the profound joy of the people's praise; now He's weeping. He yielded Himself freely to both emotions. Tears are an indication of deep feeling.

A woman went to her pastor and said, "I've been a Christian for 20 years. I've read books on how to win souls. I've memorized scripture. I've taken courses on how to win the lost. And yet I haven't won one person to the Lord. Why?"

The pastor's answer surprised her. He said, "It is because your eyes are dry." Then he went on to explain: "You haven't failed for want of knowledge, but for lack of love. When you really love someone's soul, you will care enough to weep for them." Jesus cared enough to weep.

I'm reminded of Jesus' earlier lament from Luke chapter 13. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing. See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"*

"If you had known...if only you had known the things that would bring peace to you and to your city. But you have killed my prophets and rejected my offers of peace."

The people Jesus was addressing were looking for outward peace. They wanted a Messiah to free them from oppressive Roman rule; to restore again the kingdom to Israel. They wanted political and military peace; they wanted prosperity and a nation that would be recognized by other nations of the world. But Jesus' teaching made it clear that He was offering a different kind of kingdom; a kingdom that began in the heart and provided personal peace.

How different are you and I today? It concerns me deeply that many professing Christians in North America seem more interested in how to preserve political freedoms and financial prosperity than godliness and cross-bearing. Many revel in national identity and the power of the military might to protect what we call our rights. The focus is on outward peace, the absence of conflict. But Jesus wants us to know the things that make for personal peace.

Personal peace can only be found in a relationship with the Prince of Peace. If we trade outward peace for the inward, kingdom peace Jesus offers, we'll be sadly disappointed in the end.

And then, Jesus made a sobering pronouncement about their future; the result of their failure to perceive and embrace the kingdom's peace. He said, *"For the days are coming when your enemies will surround you with a trench (palisade) of siege leading to unparalleled horrors in the city; and will beat down the city like a threshing floor, not leaving one stone on top of another."* Why? Because you did not know (v. 42) the time of your *visitation*.

What was Jesus talking about when He said they didn't know the time of their visitation? We encounter the same word in I Peter 2:11 and 12. *"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation."*

The word carries the idea of inspection, or investigation. It is the act whereby God searches out the character of men and judges them according to what He finds. In our text Jesus was present among His own people. He was offering them the opportunity to embrace His kingdom and escape judgment; but they missed the moment! As a result they would experience the judgment of God through the hands of the Roman army a few short decades later.

You and I look at this scene and we ask "how could they have been so blind; how could they have missed Jesus' offer?" But let's step back a minute and reflect on our own responses.

Today, many people profess to have embraced the Prince of Peace. But how much peace have you seen among those who call themselves His followers? Marriages and families are broken by pornography, adultery, divorce, and selfishness. Children and teens become collateral damage, filled with resentment, feelings of rejection, and violent anger. Many churches are wracked by strife and division. Bitterness, envy, and a spirit of competition control many.

Too often we're pursuing the things the world has to offer. Our actions prove we don't perceive, we don't understand, the peace Jesus offers. How much of what Jesus has for us is "hidden from our eyes" because of our failure to grasp true peace? What destruction are we experiencing in our homes, our churches, and our culture? The destruction of Jerusalem was literal; it was razed to the ground. The destruction we face is more likely spiritual, emotional, and social. And I believe Jesus weeps over our failure to perceive the kingdom's peace.

The Final RESPONSE is,

Prayer, the Teacher's Passion

Finally arriving in the city, Jesus visits the Temple. We can only imagine the grief in His heart as he saw the way in which God's house was being debased. Recall with me that Jesus' first visit to the Temple, after the inauguration of His ministry, was the occasion for a similar experience. It's recorded for us in John 2:13 to 17. There, Jesus accused the religious leaders of making God's house a "house of merchandise."

Now, on His last earthly visit to the Temple, the positions of the religious leaders have hardened against Jesus, and so have His words against them. They've turned the house of prayer for all nations into a "den of thieves." Those are significantly stronger words of accusation. They were guilty of robbing God and their fellowmen. The majesty and glory of God's house had been defiled by the greed and duplicity of those who claimed to be His worshippers.

Here was a moment of truth. Those whose businesses were upset could've said "You know what; He's right. We need to repent and change our ways." Instead, they hardened their hearts and became even more determined to get rid of Jesus. They missed the moment of repentance; and they would reap the consequences.

I realize we no longer worship in the Temple. And our meeting places are not God's house; except when God's people are present. But what would Jesus say about us, the Church, today? Is your congregation a place of prayer for all who wish to pray?

How well is your regularly scheduled prayer meeting attended? My guess is, if you have some kind of fundraising activity that includes food, or a sports event, you'll have a lot more people there than at prayer meeting. Even in churches with regularly scheduled mid-week meetings, many times, the emphasis is on Bible study or something else other than prayer.

If you're a leader, I challenge you to consider the importance of prayer and to make it a priority in your congregation. By your example you can challenge your people to see the necessity and the value of prayer. If you're a lay person you can encourage your fellow believers to significant times of prayer; and you can respectfully challenge your leaders in that too. We have a moment now, let's not miss it; repentance is possible. Let's not reject the messenger and continue on to destruction.

Finally, Jesus continued teaching daily in the temple; even as the Pharisees and leaders kept trying every day to figure out how they might destroy Him. But they were stymied in their

attempts because all the people, the whole nation (save the leaders-verse 47), were hanging upon the words of Jesus as if in suspense in mid-air. Their rapt attention angered these same leaders.

Jesus showed us by His example that prayer and the teaching of the Word go together. When these are neglected the church will be biblically ignorant and spiritually powerless. If you are part of a congregation where these are missing, you really need to find a different fellowship. This is especially true if you have young children or teenagers.

As we close let's review the RESPONSES you and I need to make sure we don't miss our moment to secure the kingdom of heaven. First, we need to proclaim the king's worth. According to First Corinthians 12:3 we can only proclaim Jesus as Lord by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. To make that confession is to admit that He is the only one who can provide salvation for us. There's no way we can earn it by our good works.

Our next RESPONSE is to perceive the kingdom's peace; the inward peace of the soul and spirit that comes to us through our relationship with God through Jesus. It is a peace we desire others to have, so much so that we will weep over their rejection of that peace.

And our final RESPONSE is to realize the Teacher's passion for prayer and to align ourselves with that passion. I believe proclaiming His worth and perceiving His peace will give us a greater desire for prayer because we will value the things God values.

Let's not be like the people of Jesus' day and miss our moment of opportunity. Let's embrace His praise, His peace, and His prayer...and enter the kingdom of heaven.